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A Discourse
By
Cutting, Sewall S.



Class 511

Book 11

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MR. CUTTING'S DISCOURSE.

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INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

ON

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GOVERNMENT AND SLAVERY:

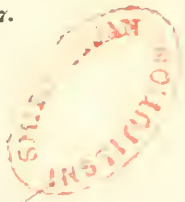
A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH,

IN

WEST BOYLSTON, MASS.

JANUARY 15, 1837.



BY SEWALL S. CUTTING,
Pastor.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

The particular reasons for publishing the following Discourse would be of no interest to the public, and need not therefore be mentioned. The publication will answer the purpose intended, and that is all I desire. In justice to myself, however, I ought to say, that I have not made my first appearance before the public, a youth and unknown, in a sermon prepared in the ordinary course of my ministrations, and which I had supposed would be, as soon as delivered, laid by for no future use, without the concurrent opinion of judicious friends.

I gave notice to my congregation, sometime since, that I intended to preach a series of Discourses on the "Influence of Christianity on the external life of man," as furnishing evidence of the truth of our Religion; and this was the second of the series. If it be objected that Government and Slavery are too distinct topics for the same discourse, I have therefore to reply, that they are only parts of a general subject. The lengthy quotations from a number of writers, I made because I thought that their names and their language, uttered in the progress of delivery, would make a better impression than the same facts stated in my own words.

DISCOURSE.

MATTHEW 13: 33.

Another parable spake he unto them : The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

On the last Sabbath we interpreted this passage, and adopted so much of the interpretation as refers to the influence of Christianity upon the external relations of life, as the topic of discourse. We then proceeded to shew *how it is* that Christianity exerts her influence—and thence deduced the practical lesson that in order to increase and perpetuate this influence, we must work as Christianity works, or she will spurn our alliance. A summary of that discourse is briefly this : Christianity awakens a new life in the hearts of individuals, and they manifest this life externally in the fruits of the Spirit. They are made better men by their religion. Their religion becomes the supporter of justice, the patroness of industry, art, letters, and science, and thus brings out into reality the noblest powers and faculties of man. By these good works the world are compelled to glorify God, and Christianity thus becomes authoritative in Society. It is therefore plain that the further authority of the Faith in Society, must be promoted without the slightest deviation from this model. We must begin where Christianity begins, and make our mightiest effort where she makes hers. She begins and carries on her work in the heart and life, and there by the power of the Cross, she brings her heaviest armoury to bear. Therefore to create men anew in Christ Jesus and promote their holy living, should be our first and determined aim. You will then have an incarnate rebuke of the sins of the world, and the language which you speak will be regarded as the voice of God. The doctrines of the Cross must be preached as the renovator of the world, and the Holy Spirit must be sought by the united prayer of the church, to

render this preaching effectual. When a deeper, and more pervading piety develops itself in the church, then may the church with better success wage and carry on her present tumultuous war against particular sins. This model Christ and his Apostles followed, and this model must we follow also.

It will now be our aim in this and the future discourses of this series, to show what Christianity in the period of its History has accomplished, in conforming the external relations of life to its spirit—and this we propose to do by looking at its influence in removing or modifying specific evils, and substituting in their place its own peculiar blessings.

1. *Let us notice its influence on GOVERNMENT.*

Government has its ground in the idea of the just—an idea belonging among the essential elements of the human mind—the idea which always commands right and prohibits wrong—and that government is therefore most perfect which develops this idea most perfectly. That is, that government is most perfect which secures to all its subjects their proper rights, through righteous and righteously enforced laws—and whose subjects, under such laws, are most loyal and obedient. It is this fundamental idea of the human mind which is developed in the government of a family; and that family government you well understand is best, which makes just regulations, and secures the most ready obedience from those whose duty it is to obey. Whatever therefore will make parents just, and children obedient—thus securing order and peace to a family, bestows a blessing on domestic life. And so whatever will make rulers equitable and firm, and subjects quiet and subordinate, bestows a blessing on government. Now does Christianity tend to this result?—and are the governments of Christendom more perfect developments of the just, than governments were previously to their coming under the influence of Christianity? We answer, *Yes*.

Christianity aims to induce in the heart those very principles which will make rulers and subjects what they ought to be. It aims to elevate man's fallen spirit to that state in which he will do right spontaneously—that is, in which he will have no disposition to do wrong, and in which he will do right because he loves the right. You see therefore at once that if Christianity does work this effect, or approximates towards it, rulers and subjects will be better as a matter of course. The ruler will do right in making right laws, and the subject will do right in obeying those laws. In proportion as the ruler imbibes the spirit of Christianity, his laws will approxi-

mate to the law of the Bible; and in proportion as the subject imbibes the same spirit, he will render obedience to such a Government as to God. The voice of the ruler but echoes the voice of God, and the ruler will be obeyed as the minister of God. If the government be popular like ours, the result will not be different. The laws of the nation will advance in righteousness with the elevation of the general moral sentiment. When the general moral sentiment becomes inspired and modified, in a higher degree, by the progressive influence of Christianity, the laws will be the faithful expression of that moral progress—and in such a community, under such laws, there will be quietness and peace. Righteousness will be justly and firmly maintained, and wickedness as justly and firmly punished.

All this is the necessary development of the Christian Faith. But you are aware that the Bible unvaryingly demands as a duty, whatever is truly and properly the offspring of religion in the heart. Therefore you hear the Bible denouncing tyranny, and threatening woes upon the oppressor;—and you also hear it demanding submission to law, and behold on its pages the record of our Saviour's submission, when he paid the tribute money to an oppressive despotism. The Bible demands righteousness in magistrates, and submission in subjects—it demands submission even when Nero sits upon the throne!

Thus you see that the elements of good government are found in the very spirit of Christianity, and that the conditions of good government are enforced, by its positive precepts, as practical duties. We have reason to expect then that government will be influenced by our religion—and our only further question therefore shall be, *has* government been thus influenced?

This is a question of fact, and must be decided by an appeal to facts. Now without controversy it is well known that in all the savage and barbarous nations of the world, questions of right resolve themselves into questions of strength. He that can conquer is the absolute ruler. Moral principle hardly developes itself in the laws. And if we advance one step further in the progress of nations without Christianity, we shall find that although there are frequent traces of moral principle in the legal codes, yet these are hardly discernible among the enactments of falsehood;—and that since the grounds of moral obligation are neither known nor felt among the people, the little morality of the law speaks almost in vain, and insurrections and assassinations, and anarchy, are the unhappy results that af-

flict them. The republics of Greece and Rome are illustrious instances of government as perfect as it could be without the Faith, and yet miserably imperfect. Rulers did not hesitate on the slightest provocation to slay thousands, and tens of thousands of their subjects ; and on the other hand, the infuriated people did not hesitate to slay thousands of the nobles. But about one in ten of the Emperors of Rome previous to Constantine, escaped a violent death. The principle of our religion that rulers should rule justly, and subjects obey peaceably, was hardly awakened in the heart, and there was safety for neither property, nor limb, nor life.

Now how wide the contrast between government of such sort, and the free, and in general Christian constitutions of England and the United States—the most free and most Christian countries on the globe ? The difference is immeasurably great. There are it is true in both these countries great and oppressive evils—for these I make no apology—and the laws are not always enforced—but property and limb, and life, are regarded as sacred ;—and both countries reiterate the sentiment of the Bible that rulers shall rule justly and subjects obey quietly. And if you will study the characteristics of the different nations on earth, you will invariably find that their justice and peace and permanence, are in exact proportion to their reverence of the Christian Faith. Moreover if you will go back through the ages which have intervened between the times of the Grecian and Roman republics and this, you will find that the progress of government has ever been side by side with that of our religion. Christian rulers were the first to rule with justice, and Christian subjects the first to practise a quiet subordination. The laws of the Visigoths, of Charlemagne, of Basilus and Lotharius, made special provisions for the poor, the widow and the orphan, that they might be saved from the oppression of the rich in courts of Justice, and be pitied and fed ;—and this they did on the ground of Christian obligation. Tertullian challenged the infidel world to produce one Christian who had engaged in any of the frequent conspiracies against government. And thus has it ever been ;—in just the proportion that Christianity has been pure in the nations of the earth, it has bound the rulers and the people to each other, by making those just and these submissive. The subject has honored the king, and the king in return has protected the subject ;—and permanent and happy governments have been the result. Just as a family is orderly and happy where the family rules are just and are obeyed, so in such governments there has been equity and quiet

and prosperity. We cannot therefore but feel that Christianity has wrought an immense and happy influence in the respect we have considered—that here is furnished an evidence of its truth—and that government to become more perfect than it is, need only submit to the more extended influence of the Faith.¹

2. *Let us notice the influence of Christianity on SLAVERY.*

By Slavery we mean involuntary servitude—the holding of men as property. Slavery is very ancient. It was prevalent at the time of Christ and his Apostles, and is prevalent now. The question therefore is—has Slavery been influenced by Christianity—and how has this influence been effected? In remarking upon the influence of Christianity on Government, we accounted for the fact from the nature and commands of our religion, and then stated the fact—but we shall now reverse this order, by stating the fact, and then accounting for it.

(1.) The fact. This we shall learn by contrasting Slavery without Christianity, with its modification and abolition in countries under the influence of the Faith. And as my limits are brief I shall not exhibit the state of Slavery as it exists and ever has existed in savage and barbarous countries, but look only at the northern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean at about the period of the Christian era. What was Slavery then? I answer in the language of Dr. Channing—that eloquent friend of the oppressed, whose writings rank him with the best philanthropists and patriots of the times—I quote his words at length:—“It was the Slavery not so much of black as of white men, not merely of barbarians but of Greeks, not merely of the ignorant and debased, but of the virtuous, educated and refined. Piracy and conquest were the chief means of supplying the slave market, and they heeded neither character nor condition. Sometimes the greater part of the population of a captured city were sold into bondage, sometimes the whole, as in the case of Jerusalem. Noble and royal families, the rich and the great, the learned and powerful, the philosopher and poet, the wisest and best men were condemned to the chain. Such was ancient Slavery. * * * * Had Napoleon on capturing Berlin or Vienna, doomed most or the whole of their inhabitants to bondage; had he seized on venerable matrons, the mothers of illustrious men, who were reposing, after virtuous lives, in the bosom of grateful families; had he seized on the delicate, refined, beautiful young

¹ The author did not feel that the subject required him to discuss the questions of Passive obedience, and Liberty of Conscience.

woman, whose education had prepared her to grace the sphere in which God had placed her, and over all whose prospects, the freshest hopes and most glowing imaginations of early life were breathed; had he seized on the minister of religion, the man of science, the man of genius, the sage, the guides of the world; had he scattered these through the slave markets of the world, and transferred them to the highest bidders at public auction, the men to be converted into instruments of slavish toil, the women into instruments of lust, and both to endure whatever indignities and tortures absolute power can inflict; we should then have had a picture in the present age, of slavery as it existed in the time of Paul.”¹

And as I am now upon a question of fact, and as I choose to refer constantly to authorities, in exhibiting Slavery as it was in the period to which we have alluded, I will quote from an English work by the Rev. William Harness²—a man whose writings prove him also to be the faithful and undaunted friend of the oppressed. “It is very little considered,” he says, “how widely the bonds of servitude were spread, and how entirely the large body of the people, before they received the emancipation of Christianity, were depressed beneath them. In Athens the citizens were thirty thousand, the slaves four hundred thousand. [More than thirteen slaves to one freeman!] In Sparta the Helotæ were so much more numerous than the freemen, that lest they should obtain an overwhelming superiority, it was customary for bands of the Spartan youth to be sent secretly, from time to time, into the country, that they might murder every Helot whom they met. This was a measure of common political precaution. There is no reason for supposing that the number of slaves in Greece, exceeded that of other nations. In comparison with Italy, the reverse appears to have been the case. Ten thousand slaves of a day have often been sold for the use of the Romans, at Delus in Cilicia. When it was once proposed in the Senate to mark the Slaves by a peculiarity of dress, the motion was rejected on the plea of its danger, lest it should become the means of informing them of their numerical superiority. And we read of individuals who were in possession of many hundreds and even thousands of these miserable dependants”³—“ten or twenty thousand,” who tilled the lands in chains.⁴ Speaking of Athens, in another place, Mr Harness says:—“The streets, the fields, the

¹ Slavery, pp. 120, 121. ² The Connexion of Christianity with Human Happiness.

³ Vol. 1. p. 83. note. ⁴ Wilson's Ev. of Ch. Vol. 1. p. 239.

habitations of the Athenian, were crowded with his troops of slaves.

* * * * * He resented their slightest errors with the most merciless inflictions. He tutored them to duty, 'as wild beasts are tamed,' with stripes and cruelest severities. He debased their natures by habitual licentiousness; he endeavored to extinguish in their breasts every spark of generous or manly feeling, by illiberal education, by accustoming them to blows, and indignities and insults." "This," says Potter in his *Archæologia*, "was the condition of the slaves at Athens, which though deplorable enough,—if compared with that of their fellow sufferers in other cities, seems easy, tolerable, and not to be repined at. They were wholly at the command of their masters, to be employed as they saw convenient in the worst and most wretched drudgeries; and to be used at their discretion, punished, starved, beaten, tormented, and that in most places without any appeal to superior power, and punished even with death itself." "The slave was interdicted," says Mr. Harness, "from repeating the songs of the freemen." "Those are the songs of our masters, and those we dare not sing," said they, when they were requested to sing the Odes of Terpander. "What Christian could endure the thought that the old domestic animal, which had become enfeebled in his employ, should be exposed as the miserable bondsmen of the Romans were, when decay or accident had rendered them unnecessary, to perish of hopeless want, on an island of the Tiber?" Potter says of "the famous Roman Cato, a man celebrated in all ages for his exact observance of the strictest rules of justice, [that] when his servants grew old, and unfit for labor, notwithstanding they had been very faithful and serviceable to him, and had spent their youth and strength in laboring for him; for all this, when years came upon them, and their strength failed them, he would not be at the expense of maintaining them, but either turned them away to provide for themselves, or let them starve to death in his own family." The doors of the rich were sometimes kept and opened by chained slaves. The stranger could not sleep, for his rest was disturbed by the noise of "whips and lashes," and the cries of the suffering slaves at midnight. When masters of households were found dead, all their slaves "amounting sometimes to thousands" were put to death. Vedius Pollio threw his slaves, "on the most trifling fault," into his fish ponds, to fatten and make delicate his lampreys. They were slain by hundreds at the Coliseum for the amusement of the people—and at the same place, and for the same purpose, they were exposed to be devoured by lions and

panthers, which Caligula had previously fattened on the flesh of slaves to increase their ferocity.¹

Such was Slavery at about the time of Christ—so prevalent, so unspeakably cruel and murderous:—and who on contrasting Slavery then with what is now in this land, does not behold a difference unspeakably wide? But here let it be distinctly understood, that I would not excuse Slavery in this land of vaunted freedom, because it is not so cruel as it once was in Rome. Slavery is slavery, whether the slaves are well or ill treated, and under any modification I cannot but believe it sin.

I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earned.

No, I would not! I could not with my Bible in my hand, and its law within my heart!

Passing over in a word, the Christian countries of Europe which have emancipated their slaves, and also the States of this Union which have done the same noble deed, and looking at Slavery as it now exists in our Southern States, the eye is at once relieved from the pain it had felt in viewing Greece and Rome. The slaves at the South are of a widely different character from those who wore the chains in ancient times,² and their number compared with those in ancient Slavery, is small indeed. We have but about two and an half millions of slaves in the Slave-States, to four or five millions of freemen; and to make the number equal to that of Greece and Rome, that two and an half millions must be increased to almost one hundred millions. And although there are many, very many oppressive laws on the slaves, and the laws which protect them are not always enforced; and although there are many cases of licentiousness and cruelty, as there always will be, while the odious system of Slavery exists in any form—yet the laws provide for their general good treatment—I mean physically, of course,—and a majority of the slaves are well fed, well clothed, and not overworked.³ Indeed although Slavery is still the same in principle, *and is the greatest wrong which one man can inflict upon another*—(I say not

¹ Harness, Vol. 1. pp. 89, 90, 93, 115, and 91, 116 where the quotations from Potter may be found; Vol. 2, pp. 11, 13, 15, 16. Ovid, Amor. Seneca, Epis. Wilson's Evidences of Ch. Vol. 1. p. 239, Fuller's Complete Works, Vol. 1. p. 131.

² This however affects the *evils* of Slavery, not the *principle*.

³ This is a question of fact, and the evidence is before the public. Others doubtless will think differently from myself. I might have added that in many parts of the South,

the greatest sin in the sight of God, as some say, for concerning that, God has made no revelation) it is practically quite a different thing, from what it was in the period we have before contemplated.

And what has made this difference? What genial influence has wrought this change? Christianity has done it. The page of history is plain on this subject. "Constantine," says Mr. Harness, "issued a decree that every slave who embraced Christianity, should receive his immediate emancipation. 'As our Redeemer become incarnate,' said Gregory the Great on emancipating his slaves, 'to deliver us from the slavery of sin; so should we restore those to freedom who are constrained by the Slavery of men? Religion and liberty advanced with an equal progress; whenever the church received any donation of lands, the vassals of the soil were baptized, and emancipated. The constant penance which the Confessor imposed on the crimes of every wealthy penitent, was the enfranchisement of his own slaves, and the redemption of the slaves of others. In every Christian country, the miseries of Slavery have retreated before the gospel, or contended in a yielding opposition to the zeal of its benevolence. Like Satan it has been trodden down under foot of the Messiah; all evil things appear tenacious of existence, but however protracted may be her expiring agonies, Slavery has received her death-blow; and that blow was given by one who gloried in the Cross of his Saviour, and was actuated by the motives, and argued on the principles of Christianity." ¹ Such has been the influence of our Faith upon the involuntary servitude of men—and such must be its influence, till the hated evil is driven from one hiding place to another, and eventually is forced to forsake the earth. My assurance of the ultimate freedom of all men would receive no increase, should I see it prophesied in sun-like letters, all along on the blue vault of the sky. Christianity and Slavery are antagonist principles, and Christianity must conquer.

Such being the fact, (2.) we account for it. How has Christianity wrought this influence? A stranger to the principles of Christianity would have pronounced such an influence impossible. But it was not so. Christianity made the master mild, and the slave meek under his injuries. It drew their hearts to each other, and

a majority of the Slaves receive oral religious instruction. As large a proportion of blacks are professors of religion as whites, perhaps a larger. Still, to say that rational beings are treated as God would have them treated, when they are denied intellectual cultivation and the reading of His word, seems to me preposterous. And yet if they had every intellectual and moral advantage, Slavery would be Slavery still!

¹ Vol. I. p. 119.

in the words of Paul, made them "beloved brothers." 'This was the legitimate working of faith in the heart. To quote the words of Mr. Harness once more: "Confidence expelled restraint;—the yoke of servitude was lightened:—the exactions were mitigated:—the severities repressed:—the bonds were broken."¹

And not only did the spirit of Christianity tend to this result, but its teachings likewise. Neither Christ nor his "chiefest Apostle" said one word directly against the unlawfulness of Slavery, but they published those principles which would necessarily subvert it. When Christ said, "all things whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do ye even so to them," he urged a truth diametrically opposed to Slavery; and then wisely he left it, like leaven, to work out its own results. It was so also with Paul. He addressed the slave in language like this:—Be obedient to your masters "with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free," that is, a slave or a free-man. And to the master he said, "ye masters do the same things, moderating threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him." Thus the master and the slave were, by the teachings of religion, placed upon the same footing; of both were required the manifestations of the same new principle of heart,—and that new principle was LOVE, and that love was to melt the chains from the oppressed. Nor could the Apostle wisely have pursued another course. Dr. Wayland says, and Dr. Channing quotes his words: "Had [Christianity] forbid the *evil*, instead of subverting the *principle*, had it proclaimed the unlawfulness of Slavery, and taught slaves to *resist* the oppression of their masters, it would instantly have arrayed the two parties in deadly hostility throughout the civilized world, and the very name of the Christian Religion would have been lost amid the agitations of universal bloodshed."² "Slavery," says Dr. Channing, "in the age of the Apostles, had so penetrated society, was so intimately interwoven with it, and the materials of servile war were so abundant, that a religion preaching freedom to its victims, would have shaken the social fabric to its foundation, and would have armed against itself the whole power of the State. Of consequence Paul did not assail it. He satisfied himself with spreading principles, which however slowly, could not but work its destruction."³

¹ Vol. 1. p. 118.

² Moral Science, Boston Ed, p. 213.

³ Slavery, p. 122.

He doubtless felt a strong sympathy for the woes of the slave, and saw the wrongs of his condition—but knowing that Christianity and Slavery are in everlasting opposition, he avoided any immediate ill effects of preaching the results of Christianity, by preaching its principles. He knew indeed that the results would come in consequence, but he knew too that thus they would come peacefully. And under his preaching was commenced an emancipation which to this day has not ceased. Slavery has retreated before the extension of Religion—and before the same heavenly influence it must continue to retreat, until in vain it seeks a habitation on earth. Let the doctrines of the Cross be felt by master and slave, and the chains will sever, and the oppressed will go free.

Here then in what Christianity has done, in what she is doing, and in what her nature, her precepts, her promises and her history, pledge that she will do, to modify and remove Slavery, that greatest temporal wrong to man,—is furnished another evidence of its truth, and of the duty of regarding it as the only hope of the world. She has opened the prison doors, and brought deliverance to the captive. She has lighted up with heavenly radiance, the darkened hut of the wretch whom his master regarded as but a step's remove from the brute, and given him hope of freedom on high. In many countries she has already broke his chains—and she assures that a golden age shall yet come—when there shall be “neither lord nor slave,” but all shall be brethren—one in Christ Jesus. Happy day! God speed its coming!

I have now but few practical remarks. If, my brethren, Christianity have influence on government, let us seek to secure to her the exercise of that influence. For the discharge of our duties as citizens we are responsible to God. Let us therefore be careful to aid in placing in power those only who will use power well, and pledge ourselves to no party but the party of Christian government. Not that I would ask an alliance between the Church and the State; far from it: Christ's Kingdom is not of this world, and with forms of government his kingdom never intermeddles. I ask only that the justice and equity of the Faith, may be the living principle in the laws. And in our own lives, let us manifest a meek submission to the powers that be, acknowledging that they are ordained of God. If Paul taught submission when the King was Nero, that perpetual proverb of savageness and cruelty,—certainly then should we be submissive, when our rulers are those of our own choice. If the laws express opinions which our judgment

condemns, or tolerates evils at which our hearts revolt, it is our duty as Christians to submit until by a meek yet determined effort, we can revolutionise the general sentiment, and obtain a legal remedy. He that said *fear God*, said also *honor the King*.

As to our practical duty in regard to Slavery, I have but a word to say. I could not say much without involving myself in the prevalent discussion of that topic; and this is neither the *time* nor the *place* for a discussion of that kind. If the measures of the Anti-Slavery Society meet your views of duty, join it, and God give you success. If you choose to join another society, or none, I shall not interfere. I do not belong to any society myself, and from a general objection to societies, it is not probable that I ever shall. Indeed as a minister of Christ, I have nothing to do with this matter, except as a question of morality and religion. I have ever sought, and in this discourse I have done only the same, to shew *the principles* which oppose Slavery; these every man must carry out according to the dictate of his own wisdom,—and I shall be the last to molest him.

This however I will say; if the omnipotence of Christianity be opposed to Slavery, then whatever is done to promote Christianity is the best and strongest weapon to bring against this evil. I am therefore confident that in every prayer you offer—in every hymn that ascends from yonder gallery—in every sermon from this pulpit, Emancipation is promoted. Yes, even at the South, the minister of religion who holds up to master and slave the Cross of Christ, as the sinner's only hope, preaches Emancipation. The pious, but we think mistaken slaveholder, who gathers his family around his own fire-side—his wife, his children, his slaves—to join in prayer to God, promotes Emancipation. And even the pious but afflicted slave, who in the lonely cabin that has been desolated by the sale and removal of his wife and child, if he have faith in the Saviour of sinners, and offer his tearful and broken prayer to God—even he, promotes Emancipation. The elements of Emancipation, in the spirit of Christianity, are at work silently, yet certainly, all over the South—and can no more be separated from the moral feeling there, than warmth can be from the burning sun. Promote Christianity therefore, and the slaves will go free.

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